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DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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DRAMA

VOL. 10

MARCH MCMXXXII

NUMBER 6

THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By S. R. Littlewood

IT is no use pretending that "Helen!" is not the most important production of the past month—not to mention the year. "Julius Cæsar" and the "Romeo and Juliet" revivals are all very well, but "Helen!" is to all intents and purposes, a fresh as well as lovely creation. Some old fogeys remember the first Adelphi production of '64 and those at the Alhambra and the Gaiety later on. But for everyone under seventy Cochran and Reinhardt, Herbert and Messel, have brought into being, as with a conjuror's wand, a whole world of beauty which was not there before, and a feast of melody of the existence of which very few were even aware. I cannot claim to have seen either of the originals myself; but from a careful study of records, I am sure that, apart from Offenbach's music, "La Belle Hélène" never till now had its English chance.

I do remember that when I was a child I heard the song of Paris and the Three Goddesses on Mount Ida. It has haunted me ever since. It seems to me to prove to us that there was something very much more in Offenbach than is allowed by the still-grudging tributes of the music-critics. It proves that he was a poet. This melody itself brings with it, for me, the mountain breeze, fragrant with the scent of far-off flowers. I do not think enough is made of it by Dr. Koingold, who emphasises his own expansion of a very commonplace waltz-rhythm.

Someone should one day make an opera round Offenbach himself—the wizened, pushful old Jew, who hoped in vain to hear his own "Barcarolle" played in public before he

died; the enchanter of the age of whiskers and crinoline, whose contemporaries saw nothing in him but a splutter of fireworks from the hectic Paris of the Second Empire. Peace to his fevered spirit!

Then there is Mr. Herbert's happy saving of the dramatic situation by making the Council of Princes a skit upon the League of Nations, and by that last-act satire upon the Great War. Also I am quite certain that nothing an earlier generation saw would compare with the Watteau-and-Wedgwood visions that Messel has designed, or Massine's bacchanal, or the ethereal charms of Evelyn Laye in that cloud-like bedroom. The personal humour of Mr. George Robey and Mr. W. H. Berry is, I fancy, very much the same as that of Toole and Paul Bedford seventy years ago. Offenbach as a humorist was always as the Fable.

As for the production is not nearly so well designed as Tree's, and the performances far inferior, apart from Mr. Geoffrey Tearle's vigorous Anthony, which I thought admirable and the more subtle for not being obviously so. It was pleasant to hear again some of the "old timers"; but frankly I did not think any of them played so well as they used to do. Mr. Lynn Harding was quite wrongly cast as Cæsar. Mr. Basil Gill and Mr. Baliol Hollaway seemed just tired as Brutus and Cassius, and with every welcome to Miss Lily Brayton, her speech as Portia was dreadfully sing-song.

What may be done by this and the Gielgud production of "Romeo and Juliet" at Oxford

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

—and Mr. Whitmore's at the Embassy, and other revivals present and to come, is that they will force our dear young people to learn the lesson of Shakespearean speech. The dreadful failure of the Old Vic to create a standard and a school in this—I am on the whole glad that Mr. Harcourt Williams has given up practising Shakespeare for the moment—accentuates the need for that mastery of blank verse elocution which only the blend of youth and long training can give. On the one side the “conversationalists.” On the other the “psalm-singers.” Only those who have lived with it know.

We have had, besides these Shakespearean efforts, rather a spate of “period” plays—none of them to me very satisfactory. “Punchinello” is to have another chance. Mr. Clifford Bax's “The Rose without a Thorn” introduced a hopeful theme in Katheryn Howard's tale; but personally I was not impressed with the reality of Miss Angela Baddely's bright young Katheryn or with Henry the Eighth as a blubbery booby, when we knew all the time his cruelty and craft and his boast that he “did not let his Cap know his counsel”

Of all the “costume-pieces of the month I enjoyed most Mr. G. K. Chesterton's “Judgment of Dr. Johnson.” Of course it was Chesterton speaking again and again from under Johnson's wig, but Chesterton is big enough for the one voice to be pretty well as acceptable as the other. It is not the ass in a lion's skin, but one lion in another's—and the cleverness of the Wilkes plot and the perfect playing of that agreeable rascal by Mr. Leon Quartermaine made this “Chesterton game” for me a thoroughly jolly entertainment.

Then there's the return of the *Compagnie des Quinze*, with M. Obey's “*Bataille de la Marne*” and “*Le Mantaise Conduite*”—both delightful things, but neither of them quite so memorable as “*Noe*” and “*Le Viol de Lucrece*.” I should like to mention also the arrival of the Newcastle Players in “*The Last Coupon*.” The only thing wrong with this was that the dream-scene needed a dream-production. The unearthing of de Curel's “*L'envers d'une Sainte*” as “*The Dark Saint*” seemed to me just to forfeit what point there was in the original.

TAVISTOCK LITTLE THEATRE.

THIS new venture in the Little Theatre Movement has a distinctive feature in its close connection with an educational body. It is housed in the buildings of the Mary Ward Educational Settlement (Tavistock Place, W.C.1.), and its members are also members of the Settlement. This merging of two streams in community life is significant; the Settlement, the centre of adult education in the neighbourhood, has found that a theatre is necessary to the completion of the work it undertakes; the players on their side find they can work most effectively and most congenially within the machinery of the Settlement. The practical advantages of the arrangement are obvious: within the Settlement there is a Boys Club Dramatic Society, and several adult classes in subjects connected with the drama are held there weekly. These, it is hoped, will become recruiting grounds for the Repertory Company from which new members can constantly be drawn. Again, the Settlement provides the nucleus of a regular audience, and its publicity work can serve also the Theatre: the Settlement news-sheet has already published interviews with Ashley Dukes and with St. John Ervine.

The Theatre is under the direction of Horace Fleming, and the producer is Robert Mitchell, late of the Willesden Players. Already this term, plays have been offered, ranging from Quintero's comedy, “*The Lady from Alfaqueque*,” to St. John Ervine's “*Jane Clegg*” and Shaw's “*Candida*.” It is worth noting that it has been possible to cast “*Candida*” without drawing on any of the players used in “*Jane Clegg*.” After Easter four plays are to be given by the Company; “*When Crummies Played*,” Sir Nigel Playfair's arrangement of “*The London Merchant*,” “*The Macropulos' Secret*,” by Karel Capek, and “*The Government Inspector*,” by Gogol, have already been selected. Ultimately, the Repertory Company will fill the bill most weeks. In these early days visiting companies are asked between the productions of the resident players.

The whole lighting system of the Theatre is to be reorganised, and the field for experiment offered by this conjunction of education and drama will be made all the wider by an up-to-date scheme of stage lighting.

Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth attended one of the performances, and made a welcome and encouraging speech from the stage. He emphasised particularly the part which a faithful audience could play in making successful such a venture as this.

N. G. L.

St. Margaret's School, Welwyn, is one of those places where children are helped among other things to perform plays that are something more than a mere show, that are really an experience. This Christmas time they did a version of “*Baboushka*” specially written for the occasion and based on Russian folk lore. Much thought and skill had been put into its production and the young performers carried it through with a sincerity that spoke well for their training and intelligence. Some really beautiful costumes had been made at the school and great resourcefulness was shown in the effects obtained on the small stage.

JOHN BOURNE.

DRAMATIZED BIOGRAPHY

By Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies

AS a preliminary to thinking about this subject it occurred to me that it would be a good thing to find some outstanding examples of dramatized biography. I chose six plays that I have seen personally, and which have struck me as being outstanding. The first of these is Shakespeare's "Henry VIII," and then the more modern dramatized biographies of "Abraham Lincoln," "Saint Joan," "Elizabeth of England," "The Lady of the Lamp," and "The Barretts of Wimpole Street."

"Henry VIII" is not, perhaps, first rate compared with Shakespeare's other plays, but it afforded Shakespeare the opportunity for perhaps three outstanding character studies: the King (to depict such a faithful and uncomplimentary study of whom Shakespeare must have been a very brave man), Catherine of Aragon, and Wolsey.

The next one—John Drinkwater's fine play, "Abraham Lincoln," shows us Abraham Lincoln, against a background of civil war in America, fighting for his convictions and his ideals, yet knowing that what he believed to be right was causing grief and death to his fellow-citizens, and ultimately losing his life for the sake of the cause.

"Elizabeth of England" (again a very interesting play) I feel is, consciously or unconsciously, influenced a little by Mr. Lytton Strachey's "Elizabeth and Essex." The aging of Elizabeth, deprived of everything she so longed for—love and beauty—typified for her clinging passionately to young Essex and seeing these slipping away from her. What an interesting clash of the Protestant versus Catholic points of view—the striving for dominion of the two, as typified by Elizabeth and Philip of Spain, and the ultimate triumph by Elizabeth the Queen over Elizabeth the woman.

"St. Joan": Popular idealism had hitherto seen The Maid as a "religieuse," a mystic, a fanatic. Shaw shows her as a rough peasant girl, her fixed ideals and dreams carrying her through all obstacles. Shaw certainly would have us believe that Joan had no more supernatural quality about her than any of us might have after listening to the voice of conscience, a "Voice" which he claims we are all endowed with. This, of course, is a controversial point upon which everyone will not agree. But in any case it seems to me that Mr. Shaw's

St. Joan is one of the great women's parts, and will rank with the Cleopatras and the Juliets—a part to which any number of interpretations can be given according to the temperament of the actress who plays her.

"The Lady of the Lamp": A play in which I appeared with Miss Edith Evans. A rather original viewpoint of Florence Nightingale, influenced also by Mr. Lytton Strachey's character study. The popular idea of her had hitherto been one of a somewhat anæmic spinster of Victorian qualities. Mr. Berkeley's play showed quite a different woman—a woman of iron will, driving her purpose forward—and for this reason it is a play of great dramatic power.

"The Barretts of Wimpole Street": In which I have most recently been playing in the character study of Elizabeth Barrett. Mr. Besier is acknowledged to have been very faithful to what is known about Elizabeth, but his rendering of the character of the father has caused a good deal of controversy. It does, perhaps, stress some aspects of his character, rather to the exclusion of other aspects.

Now, if we look back over this extremely brief resume of these various plays, one thing is striking: that in each case the dramatist has been more concerned with the dramatic effect than with biographical accuracy. In other words, they are all fine plays, and they would have made their name as plays, quite apart from the fact that they have been written about well-known people. Which brings us to an interesting point, namely, as to how far it is legitimate for an author to depart from accuracy for the sake of dramatic significance in the theatre. It seems to me that it is quite legitimate to take certain liberties with fact, but that it is not legitimate to tamper with the fundamentals of character. In other words, I don't think it would be legitimate to portray the character of Elizabeth, for example, as a vamp. But within these limits I consider that it is legitimate for an author to take certain liberties with time, sequence of events, and details of this kind.

A dramatist must in any case choose only such incidents in a person's life as are likely to be of dramatic value. But even so he must tread with caution, for it is more or less true

DRAMATISED BIOGRAPHY

to say that the biography of to-day is the history of to-morrow, and when treating of a woman who has lived so recently as Elizabeth Barrett there is a great deal of accessible and accurate information that must be respected. We know just the sort of person Elizabeth was, and also what her father was like—her family life, her brothers and sisters—through her eyes.

In "Elizabeth of England" there is also a deal of data to go on—contemporary records, letters of statesmen and ambassadors—but those records cannot be so definitely depended upon so that two historians writing independently might fairly deduce from the same documents very different theories as to what actually happened. As Mr. Leslie Hotson has pointed out, Elizabethan statesmen would often write not so much what really did occur as what they knew their royal masters would wish to have occurred. So we see that historical documents may not always be relied upon, and that there is therefore more justification in taking liberties with a historical play, dealing with persons who lived three hundred years ago, than in the case of dealing with persons who lived within living memory.

Why do we find biographical plays interesting? Partly because of an inherent love of being brought into contact with something true, as distinct from something which is purely imaginary. But of late years a considerable change has crept into popular taste in biographical drama. We are less interested in facts for their own sake, and more interested in characters. The modern person is interested in the psychological aspect—in mental reactions, thoughts and "atmospheres." Modern biography, sensitive as it is to this change is, therefore, in many ways much more enthralling to us than the old-fashioned kind. One might say that Lytton Strachey was the father of the modern biographical play, since his literary treatment of famous people, making them vivid and living personalities, set a new standard which the biographical dramatists have been quick to adopt.

To return to "The Barretts of Wimpole Street," Mr. Besier has taken this play and very faithfully represented the facts as they were, taking minor liberties with them for the purposes of the play—which is, I think, quite legitimate. He has given the father's character in terms of a very harsh and crude colours,

stressing the bigotted attitude of the man to the exclusion of other qualities which we know he possessed—his love for Elizabeth and pride in her achievements as an authoress; his splendid strength of character, although limited and narrow-minded. Mr. Besier concentrates on this cruel and harsh side because he wants to get the two contrasts in his play between the father and the love of Elizabeth and Robert, which is really the central theme of the play. Elizabeth is the light, and the father an immense shadow.

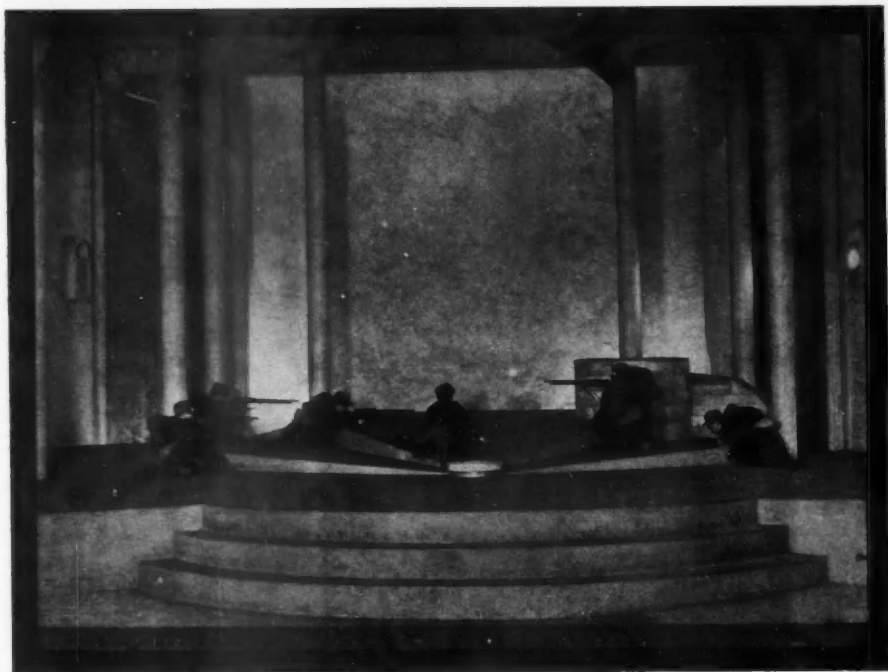
In his drawing of Elizabeth Mr. Besier was, I think, extremely faithful to the facts. Before taking up the part, I myself read a good deal about her, and formulated an opinion as to what I thought she was like, and it is significant that I had reconstructed her in my own mind in exactly the same way as Mr. Besier.

From an actor's point of view, biographical plays are enormously interesting. It is wonderful to be playing a person who really has lived, and to be showing him again, and giving him as it were a second life. That is a thing that interests one more than playing in the ordinary way, and formulating one's own ideas as to the character one is playing. It is very thrilling to think the dead are coming to a kind of resurrection in you, linked with the past and the present as well.

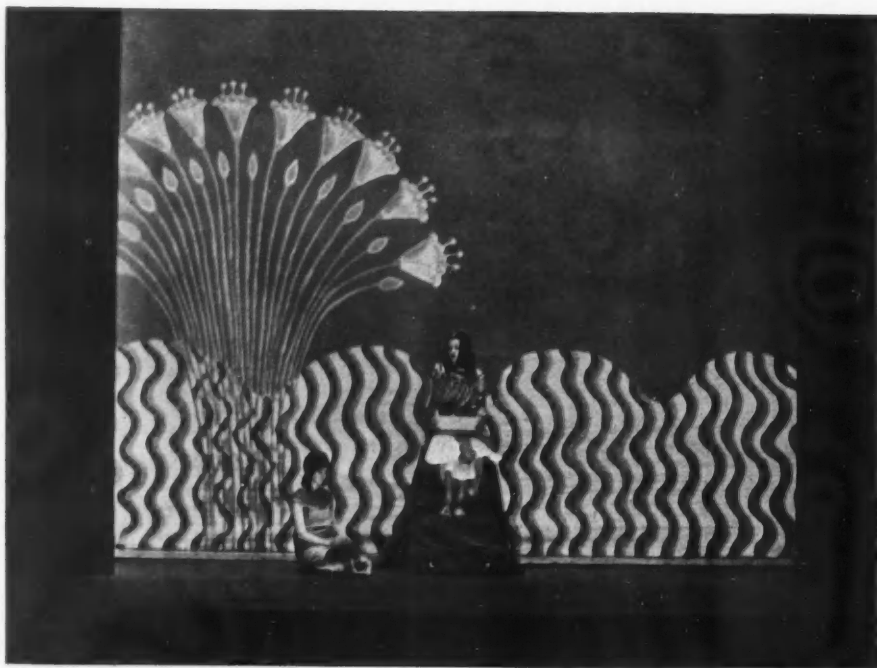
WATFORD SCHOOL OF MUSIC.

The Dramatic Society attached to the Watford School of Music has recently acquired a little Theatre and has been able to build and equip its own stage—an achievement largely due to the enthusiasm and energy of the producer Miss Lloyd King.

The opening play given in December last was "Melloney Holtspur" by John Masefield. The cast is to be congratulated on its courage in tackling what was definitely a difficult play. A programme of three one-act plays followed on February 13th.—"The Spinners of Lushe" by Philip Johnson, "The Theatre" by Harold Rubinstein and the first production of a new play "The Guitar" by Ernest Samways, a member of the Society. This last was a thrilling episode of Bandit life in Spain and describes the means a Spanish Countess took in revenging herself on her husband's murderers. The three plays were well produced and sufficiently varied to provide a pleasant evening's recreation. With the increased facilities afforded by the new premises, the development of this Society's work will be watched with interest.



"LA BATAILLE DE LA MARNE"
AS PRESENTED AT THE NEW
THEATRE, LONDON, BY LA
COMPAGNIE DES QUINZE.



"IN ANCIENT EGYPT," SCENE FROM
MISS EDITH E. CLEMENT'S RECENT
VERSE-SPEAKING MATINEE AT THE
ARTS THEATRE CLUB, LONDON.

THE UNIVERSITY ACTOR

By Alistair Cooke

THERE is one charming curiosity of the London stage who is soon likely to become a problem. He is the university actor. He has often been a strength and a refreshment to the profession; we could not wish that Mr. Robert Speaight, Mr. Colin Keith-Johnston, Mr. Gyles Isham, and Mr. Peter Hannen (now, alas, no longer with us) had chosen another. But they are justified in their choice by the same standards as any other actors: they have shown an instinctive ability to avoid appearing amateur, they have worked hard and they have personal qualities of voice or physique, or both, that could not be better employed.

Yet their success is easily coveted by any young man with three years to spare in which to grow lovesick with the theatre. And that that success is plentifully and indiscriminately sought is a truism known to too many university producers and tutors.

And, indeed, it is an attractive temptation. The university actor (I am speaking now of Oxford and Cambridge, whose societies have recruited enough fine actors to the West-End to be regarded as potential training grounds, an opinion I should like to dispute) is usually a person of pleasant appearance who is prepared to follow his producer's directions with understanding and courtesy and who can speak the King's English. These things alone will assure him, if he has a little initiative, a steady ten lines in most plays in the West-End. In period revivals he is constantly to be seen as a footman or courtier. He is certain of tiny parts. And it is sad to think that normally he goes on playing them for many years before he realises that acting was a pleasant hobby at the university, an agreeable accomplishment which taught him, by the way, a certain discipline and unselfishness, but is no basis for a lifetime's work. If, as often happens, he has a small income, it can be used in more exciting and courageous ways. If not, he becomes embittered or indifferent only at a time when it is humiliating for him to start at the bottom in any other profession.

There is, of course, every reason to suppose that a young amateur with the natural gifts and the capacity for withstanding prolonged bouts of living, as we say, on his nerves should find,

in the O.U.D.S., or the A.D.C., or the Mummers, admirable opportunities to learn his job. But it requires hard courage to step down from the local pedestals of the universities and begin to learn the business of acting, step by step, either from other people, at an academy, or from himself in an over-worked repertory company.

One tends also, to assume that because university productions are generously heralded in the London press, their quality is inevitably higher than most other amateur productions up and down the country; which sometimes they are and sometimes are not. And when the London critic notices in one column a Cochran premiere and in the next a university production he is imputed by the undergraduate actor, who is yet no vainer than his fellows, with the grace of spotting birds by their like feathers. But the chill is to follow and the pity is that men with, presumably, other mental ability should discard their proper talents and attempt to compete with, often, blockheads who nevertheless have superior beauty, intuition, and acting intelligence. Lately, more complex causes than conceit or the love of dramatising one's life have encouraged earnest but incompetent people to persuade themselves that the smell of the theatre is in their nostrils.

For example, the wave of interest in the theatre which broke on Cambridge about five years ago was admittedly an admirable event. It was due probably more than to any other man to Mr. Terence Gray, whose direction of the Festival Theatre introduced to the university important theatrical topics that one expects to be discussed only in Russia, America, or Germany. At the time, the interest divided almost sheerly between those who thought about the theatre and those who acted. Both groups had equal zest but not equal knowledge. And the common result of the critics' outpacing the practitioners in an art is to compel the practitioners from self-respect to swallow whole undigested theories: and in short to encourage preciosity. One consequently became accustomed to watching the amateur societies sketchily apeing the methods of production that Mr. Peter Godfrey, Mr. Herbert Prentice, and Mr. Gray himself,

THE UNIVERSITY ACTOR

could expertly practise at the Festival Theatre. The effect on the undergraduate actor was to leave him more modest about his own standing, more ambitious, more convinced that the theatre has a new vitality if it cares to know the methods of that vitality, and more anxious to do something about it.

Unfortunately, there are now more people with some knowledge but with less natural ability to use it. Which means that actors incredibly amateur now think of going on the stage who five years ago would have

embraced the decent prospects of a barrister, parson, or pedagogue.

But also there is a valid emotional reason. The concreteness of friendship at the old universities is for some people very difficult to abandon. And the theatre offers a similar atmosphere, unrelated to any particular sense, of comradeship. So while their parents are discussing the ancient question of what to do with one's sons, these undergraduates are trying to solve the, for them, more modern one of what to do with one's friends.

FESTIVAL OR COMPETITION?

By G. E. Middleditch

IN conversation with amateur societies from all over the country one is surprised at their ignorance of the functions of the British Drama League. Even those who have a wide knowledge of the League often forget that it is not concerned with amateurs alone and that its energies cannot be expended upon actual dramatic performances. Another organisation the National Festival of Community Drama, *under the auspices of the League*, provides affiliated societies with a practical application of the League's ideals. The Festival, after subscribing to the general aim of the League "To assist the development of the art of the theatre and to promote a right relation between drama and the life of the community," focusses attention upon the need to "raise the standard of production among amateur societies... promote a high standard of appreciation among audiences... encourage the progressive element."

It may be clearly seen therefore, that the Festival carries a heavy burden of responsibility in which, directly or indirectly, every one of its participants shares. How shall that responsibility be borne? Who shall be certain that the enthusiasm and the energy and the vision which are needed shall always be forthcoming? What shall be the stimulus? Human nature does not invariably, perhaps very seldom, respond to an appeal for loyalty, or for social services or for love of art. Amateur actors

generally speaking, are only upon the threshold of aesthetic appreciation and responsibility and will not for a long time realise that the onus of proving that staged drama is superior to the mechanised forms, may rest entirely with them.

Fortunately we do not have to wait for them. Those of us who see the wider significance of the amateur's work find that we can arouse the enthusiasm, vigour and determination of the others by a very simple expedient. We appeal to the instinct to "beat your neighbour," to compete, to prove one man better than another. We say to Little Buddlington, "Those theatrical prople up at Great Buddlington are going to win this competition unless you enter." What is the result? Almost invariably both societies work harder and more intelligently and the immediate results are two good performances instead of a single flabby one; which is only to say that two separate audiences will hold a far higher opinion of the value of amateur dramatic art in general and of staged drama in particular. Thereafter it is surely a *sine qua non* that "the progressive element" will be encouraged.

But some say that competition breeds rancour and jealousy; that it kills the Festival spirit. Do they know what they mean by Festival? A reliable dictionary defined it as a "Joyful celebration" and the phrase conjures up a horrid scene of earnest

FESTIVAL OR COMPETITION ?

choric dancers raising flushed faces to the dramatic dawn ! . . . Let us pass on. We come to a consideration of the word as the Greeks used it. Alas ! Their festivals were all competitive. So there appears to be no such thing as the Festival spirit ? Then does competition, since it cannot kill what does not exist, do any other harm ?

The answer must be "no," for there is always the example of thousands of societies which are sufficiently well mannered and good humoured to compete and to lose without losing their tempers. To pander to the others, is to eliminate the greatest stimulus of enthusiasm; that gone, there will be no zest for increased proficiency; then a lowering of standards must follow to the detriment of amateur dramatic art. It will be a surrender to those pallid and anæmic spirits who wear a cloak of æsthetic superiority and raise an umbrella of preciousness to protect themselves from the pitiless rain of criticism.

How would they look in any sort of game they might play ? Imagine their non-competitive racquets boggling at Borotra's service; imagine the joy of their partners doomed to defeat. Or in bridge; see how their Festival spirit gives a grand slam and rubber to their opponents ! For presumably, if one renounces the competitive spirit one allows the other side to win ? And the corollary is surely that, if he has a sincere desire to act, one should allow the veriest nincompoop to foot it with the best on any stage, to the absolute defeat of art, but to the triumph of the Festival spirit ! . . . One cannot admit this logic which would sacrifice the whole to save a part.

Standards exist to be raised, not lowered, and since it is the declared purpose of the National Festival of Community Drama "to raise the standard of production among amateur societies," it is encouraging to note that as a result of employing the competitive element entries for the Festival every year exceed those of the last, and players who are one year placed low in the list and are severely criticised enter the next Festival with a greater determination to win and—consequently—with far more proficiency.

SOME RECENT PLAYS IN CHURCH.

Recently at St. Anne's, Soho, Mrs Martin Browne produced on several successive evenings a Peace Pageant entitled "Disarm !" written by Mrs. Martin Browne, and previously performed at Brighton. Crowded congregations were impressed by the deep sincerity of the play which introduces as its final scene the Council of the League of Nations shocked into action by the sudden revelation of the horror of war. Now and again some elements of the play seemed a little beyond the capacity of the players, but on the whole, the performance achieved its aim.

On another page we have put a photograph of a scene in a very beautiful Nativity play produced at Staverton in Devonshire.

We must also mention a very interesting dramatic representation of the book of Job which was acted in the beautiful Congregational Church at Ealing in the middle of February. The book of Job has often been characterised as a dramatic dialogue, but we confess to finding much of the long discussion between Job and his comforters unsuited to the stage. The earlier and later scenes, however, had a real dramatic urge about them, and were helped by very original production and excellent organ music and lighting.

PETER HANNEN.

DIED JANUARY 20TH, 1932, AGED 23.

YOUR part is played . . . The empty stage is dark.

Slowly the curtain falls, and we have seen
The tragic ending. We have sighed with you
And shared your merry jests. We never dreamed
The play would be so short, or end so soon.
But now the stage is empty, and the friends
You left behind are glad of just one thing :
That they have been your friends. Your happy heart
Made happy those you met.

You have gone on
To take your part upon that other Stage,
Where all of us must, one day, out-play Time
Before the Greatest Critic.

Splendid youth
Was yours, and golden promise, that must be
Forever unfulfilled upon this earth.
You have passed by, but with that passing, you
Have left us better than we were before
You came and lit our lives with your wise smile . . .
Your wise and gentle smile.

We, who remain,
Must take one last look at the empty stage
And turn to con our lines, that, when we hear
Our cue, and make our Exit, we may go
Forward, as you, and leave behind a world
As much more rich in joy because we lived
As you have left for us . . .

Till then—Fare Well.

GILLIAN MILES.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF
THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE
INCORPORATING
THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

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MSS. for publication in DRAMA will be considered if accompanied by stamps for return if unsuitable. All Enquiries should be addressed to the Hon. Secretary at the Office of the League, 8 Adelphi Terrace, London, W.C.2.

Telephone: TEMPLE BAR 8507-8.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

WE regret to announce that Mr. Granville-Barker has found it necessary, on account of increasingly prolonged absence in the country and abroad, to resign his position as Chairman of the Council of the British Drama League. When, in 1919, the idea of the League was first mooted, Mr. Granville-Barker was among the first to be concerned in its development. To him was due, more than to anyone, the general scheme on which the organisation of the League was based, and since that time, until a few weeks ago, he, as Chairman of the Council, has been continuously and beneficently active in the furtherance of the League's policy, practical and artistic. The Council, recognising the situation created by Mr. Granville-Barker's continued absence has perforce accepted his resignation from office. But they are glad to be assured that their late Chairman's interest in the League remains undiminished, and they look forward to many occasions in the future when Mr. Granville-Barker's long connection with the League may not only be gratefully remembered but, in other ways, maintained in active being.

We are glad to print on another page a shortened version of the lecture delivered to members of the Drama League Club Room by Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies on the subject of "Dramatized Biography." More recently, Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge has lectured on "The Impossibility of a Romantic Revival in Drama at the present time." Future speakers are Mr. James Laver on "Costume for Ballet," and Mr. Tyrone Guthrie on "Modern Methods in Stage Production." Members of the League resident in London who are not already members of the Club should apply for particulars without delay. Visitors are also welcome, and may obtain Guest Tickets on application.

Festival performances are now in progress throughout the length and breadth of the country. This year the record number of nearly six hundred entries is expected, and the Judges already report a higher all-round standard both in the towns and the villages. The National Final in London is rather later this year, as few of the preliminary Festivals began before Christmas. The middle of May is the anticipated date, and full details will be announced in our next number subsequent to the meeting of the National Committee which takes place on March 12th.

All members of the League, and not least those who subscribed to the rebuilding of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford, will be glad to know that the new theatre is nearly completed, and that it will positively open for stage performances on Shakespeare's birthday, April 23rd. From what we have already seen of the interior of the theatre we can assure subscribers that they will have no cause to regret their generosity.

The Sixth Easter School for Amateur Producers will take place at the Ballet Club Theatre for the fortnight beginning April 1st next. Prospectuses of this School are now ready. Other Drama League Schools will be held at Sheffield, Exeter, Swansea, Liverpool, St. Andrews and, probably at Keswick. Particulars on application to 8, Adelphi Terrace.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

"Radio Plays" by L. du Garde Peach. George Newnes, Ltd. 2s. 6d.

"The Best One-Act Plays of 1931." Selected by J. W. Marriott. Harrap. 5s.

"Roar China," by S. Tretiakov, translated by F. Polianovska and Barbara Nixon. Martin Lawrence. 1s. 6d.

"A Short History of Costume and Armour, 1066-1800. By Francis M. Kelly and Randolph Schwabe. Batsford. 25s.

"The Deuce is in Him." By George Colman the Elder. Adapted by W. Graham Robertson. Nelson Playbooks.

AT first sight it may seem a little unfortunate on Mr. du Garde Peach that his book of radio plays has fallen into the hands of a reviewer who has never yet succeeded in enduring to the end the ordeal of listening to a play on the wireless. I am one of those people to whom a play is as much a matter of action as of words, to whom acting is ever more a matter of gesture, movement and facial expression than mere vocal inflections. Consequently, I find listening to a radio play almost as tedious as having to listen to somebody reading a story aloud. The little the actors add to the effectiveness of the radio play by means of the voice is, for me, more than counterbalanced by the slowness with which the play makes its effect "on the air" as compared to the printed page. All this is, of course, merely the personal prejudice of somebody to whom acting means appealing as much to the eye as the ear. But, although this weakness of mine unfits me for reviewing Mr. du Garde Peach's book on its merits as a contribution to radio drama, it has not prevented me from finding these plays extremely good reading. As the author himself points out in his introduction, "the printed page can never really do justice to a stage play, but with the help of the reader's imagination, an imagination which wireless plays are doing an enormous amount to quicken, the printed page can quite adequately present a radio play. If the play has made a successful broadcast it means that the author has chosen the words rightly; the result will be practically the same whether the words are read or heard." This makes somewhat curious reading in the introduction to a book of radio plays, as it is an admission that there is little to be gained by having these plays broadcast instead of simply read, but it is also a complete justification for the publication of a book which I, personally, found to be one of the most interesting and enjoyable I have read for some time.

Mr. Marriott's selection of what he considers to be the best one-act plays of 1931 results in a curiously varied mixture. The plays range from the stark effectiveness of "Vindication" to the exasperating sentimentality of "The Perfect Marriage." It seems that the editor has set out to please all tastes instead of selecting the plays according to his own critical standards. Nevertheless, although three or four of the plays in this book seem to me to have extremely little value, there are at least half-a-dozen which are first rate, so that the result is a book which is remark-

ably good value for the money. The play which I personally enjoyed most was Mr. Sladen-Smith's "Mrs. Noah gives the Sign," although I would not go so far as to claim for it that it is the best play in the book.

Mention of Mr. Sladen-Smith leads me to "Roar China," as it was Mr. Sladen-Smith who gave the first English production of this play in the Unnamed Society's theatre in Manchester. He was enabled to do this owing to the fact that the theatre is a private one and therefore does not come under the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain, who banned this play when the Cambridge Festival Theatre proposed to produce it. The propaganda of the play, directed mainly against the British Navy, is, I think, too crude and altogether too fantastic to be likely to arouse any particular indignation in this country. The only way an English audience could appreciate "Roar China" is for them to regard the English Naval officers as the gloriously and impossibly wicked villains of out-and-out melodrama. Regarded simply as superbly theatrical melodrama, the play is tremendously exciting and effective. Reading it gave me much the same thrill as one gets in watching a first-rate gangster film.

The highest praise which it is possible to give to "A Short History of Costume and Armour" is that the book is in every way up to the standard of the same authors' "Historic Costume," one of the best books on the subject yet published. The present volume is a mine of information on details which are usually somewhat sketchily dealt with by most costume books. Armour, head-dresses, hose and weapons are all very fully described and illustrated here. The illustrations are particularly fine and exceptionally numerous, consisting mainly of reproductions of contemporary pictures and manuscripts, with photographs of statues and suits of armour. The letterpress is clear and business-like and the whole arrangement of the book a model of clarity and convenience.

The most interesting of the new additions to the Nelson Play Books is Mr. W. Graham Robertson's version of George Colman the younger's farce, "The Deuce is in Him." The adapter apologises to all "intelligent and right-minded readers" for expanding Colman's promising but undeveloped plot, and shamelessly inventing the counterplot, which brings this capital play to a more dramatic conclusion and makes it a thoroughly lively piece of work which would, I suppose, play for about an hour.

Affiliated Societies in London and neighbourhood who desire a short criticism of their performances can have a visit of an expert Critic for the sum of 10/6 plus travelling expenses if the performance is out of London. For the sum of one guinea a detailed criticism will be supplied.

We are informed that Mr. Mordaunt Shairp's ingenious murder play: "She Crime at Blossoms," is shortly to be published in book form by Messrs. George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

VILLAGE DRAMA IN SCOTLAND

By Hal D. Stewart

THERE is no such thing as Village Drama in Scotland. There is any amount of dramatic activity all through the country. There are probably few villages that have not a dramatic society of some sort. But the comfortable term "Village Drama" which appears to have some special significance in England is not known north of the Tweed.

In spite of this, however, it must not be imagined for a moment that the contribution which the villages of Scotland are making to the Community Drama Movement is superficial or dilettante. The fact that there has been no Scottish equivalent to the Village Drama Society does not mean that our villages lack facilities for developing the art of the theatre along modern lines. It means, rather, that the Scottish Community Drama Association has never given preferential treatment to villages as opposed to towns. In the eyes of this association all clubs are equal, and, as a matter of fact, it frequently happens that societies in villages are better circumstanced than those in the larger centres of population, although the latter enjoy the opportunity of seeing good plays more often in the commercial theatre. Classes for producers and lectures on the Drama are now held at all convenient centres all over the country, and there are few villages, except in the Western Isles, that are so remote that it is impossible for their inhabitants to receive expert instruction in the art of the theatre.

The Festival has penetrated, by now, into the remotest parts, and this in itself is playing a tremendous part in the improvement of technique in the art of the theatre in all its departments. There can be no doubt that the phenomenal interest in Community Drama which has gripped Scotland during the past few years is to a great extent due to the annual festival. There appears to be some quality in this which appeals particularly to the Scots character. Festival performances attract large audiences in almost every centre where they are held, and one of the most important aspects of the festival is that it is not only the competing teams that receive instruction, but the audiences themselves. It is this education of audiences that will keep fertile the soil in which the plant of community drama will

flourish, and which has already made it a healthy growth that will not be blighted by the frosts of uninformed criticism.

The foregoing remarks about festivals apply to cities as well as villages, and if the enthusiasm in the latter is more concentrated than in the former it is because the village has less opportunity of seeing good commercial drama than the town, and the festival has not there so much competition from other forms of entertainment. Similarly the village dramatic club is more certain of playing to a full house than an urban society.

As has already been said there has been no corresponding society to the "Village Drama Society" in Scotland, but this article would be incomplete without a reference to the Scottish Women's Rural Institutes, which is the nearest approach to a parallel.

The S.W.R.I. is, of course, a women's movement, but it is not so narrow minded as to exclude the male population from its casts. As a matter of fact, in the early days, the Institutes in many cases did try to do without men, and their progress was, to some extent, hampered by this self-imposed restriction. A wider knowledge of the Drama, has, however, brought about appreciation of the fact that it is necessary to include men in this branch of their work, and there are few if any Institutes where men are not now welcomed.

This association does not by any means confine its activities to the theatre, but for the past five years or so it has taken up this side of its work with great enthusiasm, and the success of the Community Drama movement in Scotland is due, in no small measure, to its efforts.

The S.W.R.I., moreover, has taken up the study of Drama not only with enthusiasm, but in a business like and serious manner which augurs well for the future. Many of the Institutes employ professional coaches, who, in addition to producing the plays, give regular instruction in all the various departments of the art of the theatre. At the moment it may be said that the Festival is the keystone of the winter's work, but already some of the county Federations are realising that while the Festival is of great value, it is a mistake to regard it as necessarily the culminating

VILLAGE DRAMA IN SCOTLAND

point in the season's activities, and that there is a great field for the development of drama in the rural areas of Scotland.

There is no organisation which is better fitted to undertake the practical side of this development than the S.W.R.I., and one looks forward to the day when, under its auspices, dramatic performances in the remotest parts of the country will be regular occurrences and not the isolated events which they are at present.

One thing there is which seriously hampers the progress of Drama in the villages and smaller towns of Scotland, namely the fact that there are practically no halls which offer anything approaching adequate facilities for the production of plays. The town of Hamilton is the only one of the smaller towns of the country, so far as I am aware, where such facilities may be found.

Generally speaking there is no stage, merely a platform, which entails the use of

a complete fit-up; nor is it usual to find such a fit-up the property of the hall. As a rule, Fit-up, curtains, scenery, footlights, battens, etc., have to be hired from the nearest city, and the expense of obtaining these in this way adds so much to the general expense of the entertainment that unless the Society has ample funds, and such societies are rare in Scotland, either many entertainments which are mooted have to be abandoned, or facilities which are essential to even an adequate presentation have to be foregone.

In spite of this disability, however, there is no doubt that the Drama is flourishing in the villages of Scotland, and that it will continue to flourish there for many years to come. One hopes that the day is not now far distant when adequate dramatic fare will be generally deemed to be as necessary to the cultural life of the community as an adequate drainage system is to its health.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' DRAMA

SINCE 1926 groups of English amateur players have taken their plays abroad. The Harrow Argonauts went down the Rhine, Marylebone School took "Twelfth Night" to Schlesing, Holstein; Haileyborough took a Shaw play to Germany and a Shakespeare play to France and Switzerland; the Stewart Headlam Players took "Othello" to Hamburg and Lubeck, and for four years Castleford wandered over North Germany. The above are taken at random, and doubtless English Schools and Universities sent players abroad before 1926. Did not Cambridge send players to Stockholm? But it is clear that in the last five years there is a revival of the Elizabethan practice of sending English Players abroad. The Elizabethans were professional actors. Perhaps Shakespeare was one of them. Our modern players are amateurs, but they like to think they are in the tradition, and indeed the Lord Halifax Players announced on their programme "The English Comedians of the 16th Century return to Germany." We think this wandering is a good thing, so we have founded the International Students' Drama League to tell people what has been done, to help others to go and do likewise or better.

So far it has been Schools, or Universities or old pupils associations who have ventured abroad, and the first object of the League will be to help these groups with advice. The ideal scheme is something like this—the players pay their fare to a country, and then live on the country itself. But even if this ideal cannot be attained at first, a cheap holiday is possible. Many now know what a delightful thing it is to be welcomed on the platform, to be hurried off to a friendly house, to act a play to a foreign audience, to be engaged with them in a common enterprise, and not least to form friendships which last long after the tour is over. Both English and German pupils know all this, for four German Schools Companies have visited us. Lubeck, Eutin, Harburg and Stade have brought plays by Hans Sachs and Lessing and Goethe to many places of which I will mention Newcastle, Cardiff and London. Indeed Lessing's "Minna von Barnhelm" was the first German play produced in London after the War, and that was produced by the Entin pupils at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

The League will also encourage the visits of professional companies especially at first

to produce plays read in Schools and Universities. Already four tours have been made by French Players, and towns as far apart as Newcastle and Folkestone, Cardiff and Hull have seen a Molière play. It is good to know that "Faust" will shortly be produced in London by a German company. It ought to be possible later to get Spanish players to visit at least London and Liverpool. Englishmen are not supposed to be good linguists and anything which livens up the study of a language is welcome. We have already evidence that the French and German players have given new life to the study of French and German. It is for young people a wonderful experience to sit for two hours listening to real French and watching French actors. "So this is French" must be the feeling of many of the thousands who saw the French plays.

Fortunately Dame Sybil Thorndike is keenly interested in the League and has consented to be its first President. As Vice-Presidents we have Dr. Vaughan (late of Rugby), Dr. Clouesley Brereton, Mr. F. S. Marvin, Mr. A. E. Twentymen and Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth together with Professor Audra of Lille to represent France, Dr. Schade, the President of the German Modern Language Association and Mr. R. L. Ager the Chairman of the English Modern Language Association, and a Committee formed of people who have shown their interest in the work the League hopes to do. What we want now is a large number of members who will pay 2/6, and support our enterprise. We want people who will go abroad to play, and people who will come to see our foreign players. We want the help of people who believe it is a good thing to establish these contacts, people who are willing to help us in bartering plays by Shakespeare for plays by Molière and Goethe.

A prospectus of the League will be sent post free on application to the writer of this article at 8, Briar Avenue, Green Lane, London, S.W.16.

T. R. DAWES.

For those who would like to undertake a school acting tour abroad but do not know what such a tour entails, a brief outline of a visit to Germany in 1930, and to France, Switzerland and Germany in 1931 may be helpful.

In a short article it is not possible to do more than give the barest details, but to those who are anxious for further information the International Students' Drama League will be glad to give any help they can.

A party of twelve English schoolboys set out on the 1st April 1930 to play "Arms and the Man" in Germany. They reached Nuremberg about midday on 2nd and were distributed among various German families who acted as hosts. On the 3rd they gave a matinee and evening performance and left on the 4th for Heidelberg. The time not spent in acting was entirely filled with sightseeing and eating—our hosts whether private or official seemed determined that we should do a great deal of the latter. We acted in Heidelberg on 5th and travelled to Frankfurt on 6th where we played on 7th. Further performances were given at Karlsruhe, Freiburg i/Br and Constance on the three following days. Everywhere except Frankfurt we played to crowded houses and in all except two towns in the Municipal Theatres. In Freiburg we acted to an audience of over 1300. An almost incredible amount of sightseeing, including quite long motor drives was sandwiched in between the acting, eating and travelling. The party left Constance on 11th and returned to England on the following day. The cost to each member came to £6. 11s. 3d., and this included the costumes which remained the property of the Dramatic Society.

Encouraged by the success of this tour, it was decided to take a Shakespeare play—Macbeth—to France and Switzerland. This was a much bigger undertaking for the party could not consist of less than thirty members.

This party left England on 15th April, 1931, and played in Lille on 16th, Douai on 17th and Valenciennes on 18th, and on the journey from Lille to Douai a tour of the Northern battlefields together with 30 French boys was arranged. On the 15th we travelled to Strasbourg where after most lavish entertainment we played on 20th. The following day we played in Mulhouse and the day after in Dijon. With the exception of Douai and Dijon these performances were in School and University Halls, which were full everywhere except at Lille. On 23rd we travelled to Montreux where a matinee and evening performance were given on 24th, followed by a performance in Geneva on 25th. In this way we had in the space of ten days travelled 1,000 miles and acted nine times in eight towns, not a bad achievement for a party whose ages were mostly 18 or under. We then went to Heidelberg and stayed there three days, where we played two games of Rugby, one of Hockey and had a Swimming Competition against boys from local Schools. It is satisfactory that a party chosen for their suitability as actors were able at the end of a strenuous tour to win both games of Rugby, though they were defeated in the other events. The cost of this tour came to £9 2s. 6d. a head, again including costumes.

In addition to the purely educational value of these tours, the friendly relations established are obviously of great value. On these two tours alone over three hundred families have acted as hosts to English school boys.

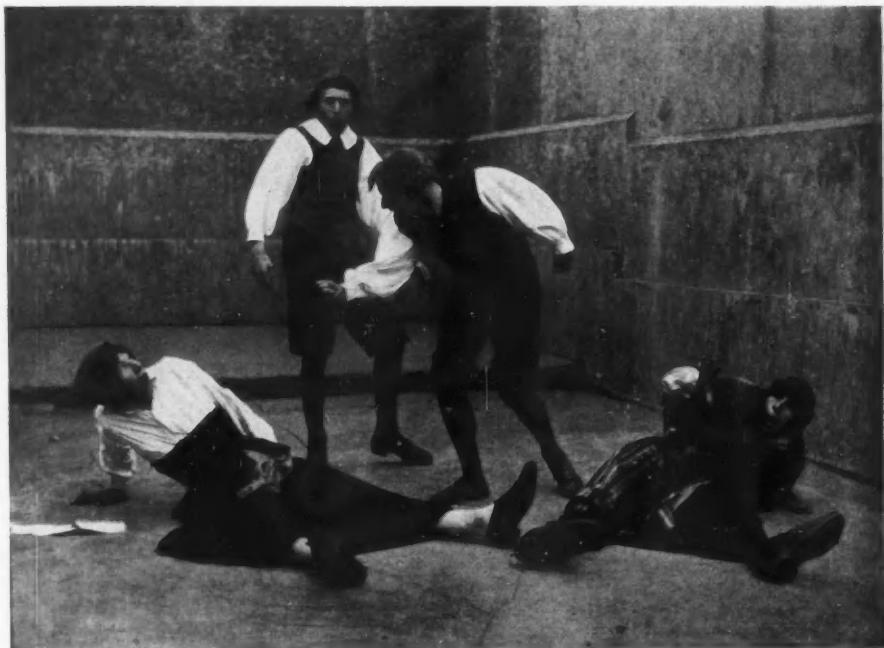
A somewhat bolder enterprise is being undertaken this year, when another party of thirty is to go to Poland and Czechoslovakia to play "Julius Caesar."

We feel that the work is now passing the pioneer stage and are anxious that it should be taken up by others. Hard work and a good deal of faith are needed; those we feel are further points in favour of such undertakings.

E. C. M.



SCENE FROM THE NATIVITY PLAY
AT STAVERTON CHURCH, DEVON,
AS PRESENTED BY THE DARTINGTON
SCHOOL OF DANCE MIME.



LUBECK CATHEDRAL SCHOOL STUDENT
PLAYERS AT CASTLEFORD, YORKSHIRE,
IN THEIR PRODUCTION OF "THE DEAD
MAN" BY HANS SACHS.

THREE NEW AMATEUR STAGES FOR LONDON

THE FORTUNE THEATRE

IT has again been decided that this Theatre shall be devoted to the productions of Amateur Theatrical Operatic and Dramatic Societies. A year ago a similar intention was announced and was in active progress when it was decided to cancel the arrangements made as there was evidence that the then hiring charge of 25 guineas per performance was beyond the resources of a large number of Societies. As it was economically impossible to make any reduction on that price the scheme was abandoned.

The enterprise is resumed because circumstances have made it possible to fix the hiring charge at the extraordinarily low figure of 15 guineas per performance.

The Theatre, one of the most artistic and comfortable in the West End, is ideally situated immediately facing Drury Lane Theatre, has a seating capacity of 500, perfect line of sight, unrivalled acoustics, excellent Dressing Room accommodation for a large cast, Schwabe-Hazeit installation with Panorama cloth, large Orchestra Well, and modern equipped Stage of the following dimensions:—Prosc. opening 25ft. 6-in., Depth 28ft.—Height to Grid 42-ft.—between Fly Rail 34-ft. Increased orchestra accommodation can be provided as required.

Opportunities to view the Theatre will be afforded to intending clients by appointment, and the management will be happy to supply additional information as desired.

LAURENCE COHEN.

GRAFTON THEATRE, TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD

THE Grafton has been called a pocket edition "Pigalle." The theatre Pigalle was built in Paris by a millionaire. The Grafton was converted in London from an old picture house; in fact the Grafton existed as a cinema in the days when people talked of bioscopes. It was the first London cinema to be converted into a theatre. It might almost be said to have been excavated, as, to get height for the proscenium and stage, considerable excavations were effected. It was opened in May 1930 by Miss Judith Wogan. She and her fellow directors produced three unusual and experimental variety programmes. Many distinguished people and authors were represented in these programmes. Miss Edith Sitwell appeared in person on the opening night, speaking her own poem "The Drum." Madame Lydia Lopokova made her first London appearance in a speaking part as Marie in Ferenoz Molnar's short play "Seven O'clock."

In subsequent productions a story by Katherine Mansfield was given as a monologue, a play by Richard Hughes, and a ballet was produced by Penelope Spencer, who also appeared personally in solo dances. Miss Sara Allgood, the famous Irish actress, delighted audiences with her poems and songs.

An Edwardian pantomime, produced for the Christmas season, 1930, led to a revival of the songs of the early years of this century.

The theatre is fully equipped with a set of easily-manipulated screens, four sets of curtains, and a very

modern switchboard with 34 circuits (including seventeen dimmer circuits with individual and master control). It also has a revolving stage, so that it lends itself to all types of production. The auditorium is stepped like a Greek theatre and an excellent view is obtained from all over the house. There is a fully-licensed restaurant and bar at the back of the auditorium. The decorations are ultra-modern and the cafe, being furnished with tubular steel tables and chairs, the colouring throughout is red and silver.

The Directors are inaugurating a new policy at the Grafton. In future they will confine their own activities to week-end productions and during the rest of the week the theatre will be let to Amateur Societies.

In these days of enterprising and original amateur groups, many interesting productions should be seen there.

The Hampstead Imps opened the amateur season in January with an original production written and produced by a member. This was well received and closed to thunderous applause when the whole company appeared at the climax, whirling round on the revolving stage.

JUDITH WOGAN.

IMPERIAL INSTITUTE THEATRE.

In the belief that we are helping to meet a real want, we have equipped the Imperial Institute Theatre for Dramatic performances. It has comfortable tip-up seats for 400—good heating and ventilation—a stage 20-ft. x 20-ft. with good lighting effects. This we are offering at the low rate of five guineas per night and for rehearsal at reduced rates.

There are curtain and box sets available when required for hire and ample dressing room accommodation. I should be very pleased to show any representative round at any time and would be glad of any help you could give in making this known to your readers.

Incidentally, we claim to be the only theatre in London which has free parking space available for anything up to 500 cars.

Captain F. B. H. DRUMMOND.
Secretary.

BURNLEY GARRICK CLUB.

This Club is now in its third season, and has issued a fine souvenir programme for its production of "The One-Eyed Herring," by Sir Frank Popham Young. The present season's productions include "The Fourth Man," "Rope," "The Rising Sun," "Dear Brutus" and "Set a Thief," an original play by one of the Club's members, Mr. G. Waldon.

Since the Club was formed members have gradually joined until to-day we have not only a large membership, but a membership which is enthusiastic and at the same unprejudiced and critical. Our thanks for this are in no small measure due to the influence of our President, A. Rought Brooks, Esq., who has at all times materially helped our choice of plays by criticism of those plays both in Committee and in Club. It is a pleasing feature of all our productions that the players themselves welcome this criticism both before and after the production and at rehearsal.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PRESS CRITICISM.

Sir,

As the representative of the British Drama League in the South-East Counties I ask your courtesy to bring to the notice of your readers an interesting and, I think important experiment that has recently been carried out in the field of Press criticism of amateur productions.

No doubt your readers have long realised, with all other responsible amateurs in the Dramatic Art, the extreme inadequacy of the provincial reporter in this connection. So long as he confines himself to a description of the plot the matter is within his scope, but in the paragraph which usually follows, containing an attempted appreciation or criticism of the acting, production, setting and so forth, both the style and the matter are truly lamentable, frequently filled with gushing and indiscriminating praise and displaying lack of any dramatic standard or background. From the point of view of the responsible amateur desiring to know where he stands such a report is quite useless, and equally it is unworthy of the Drama considered as an Art.

To reproach the Press on this score would be unfair. Except in very large towns the amount of dramatic work within the sphere of the local paper does not justify the retention on its staff of a full-time dramatic critic, and the "general reporter" has to do his best (or worst) with a very highly specialised job. An occasional or part-time dramatic critic of sufficient authority and resident in the provinces is rarely available.

The Press itself realises its difficulty—not only in respect of Drama but of Music, Literature and other specialised matters—and is frequently willing to meet the responsible amateur if a way can be found. The following course has now actually been tried. With the co-operation of the "Kent Messenger" a fully-qualified dramatic critic was obtained through the British Drama League by the Editor of that paper, himself to report direct to the newspaper on a recent production by a Maidstone dramatic group. Fee and expenses amounting to £1 18s. 6d. were paid by the group in return for which the Editor allotted to the critic an adequate space in the paper and printed the report verbatim.

The result was considered eminently worth the expense by the group. A well-written, kindly and impartial review, touching on every side of the production and written with authority, was obtained (through the Press report) by each member of the cast at a trifling cost per head, and at the same time the uninstructed Press report and the damage done by it were eliminated.

The Editor of the paper mentioned has expressed himself willing to carry through a similar arrangement with any Kentish dramatic group; the scheme is simple and practical and could doubtless be arranged with the Editor of any other provincial newspaper. Though I profess no knowledge of suburban conditions it is possibly equally needed there and equally applicable.

It may seem at first sight a trifle hard that the amateur should pay for his own criticism, but I am convinced that it is not worth while for the press to do so and the question accordingly is—is it worth ~~our~~ while? I am convinced, and I hope your readers will be convinced,

that it is so, both for our own self-respect and for the honour of amateur Drama.

The National Festival with its reported criticisms does much good in this way but only once a year and over lamentable small area compared with the great annual flood of amateur productions.

I urge your readers to bring this matter before their respective Committees with a view to their next production. It would be a great interest to hear their experience in due course as to how the scheme works in various localities.

Let it be remembered that no *one* thing could do more to raise both the standard of amateur drama and the prestige of amateur drama throughout the country than responsible Press criticism—and that it is for members of the B.D.L. to show the way.

Yours faithfully,

BERNARD J. BENSON.

WHAT DO THE VILLAGES ACT?

Dear Sir,

I have been collating pages 74-95 of your Village Drama double number to find out which are the favourite plays of the moment. Leaving Shakespeare out one is surprised at the great number used once only. Some thirty-two were played twice. The favourites are:—"The Dear Departed," "Mr. Sampson," seven times each; "The Price of Coal," "The Spinsters of Lushes," "Women will gossip," four times each, (two of these if not all three are for women parts only); "A Bit of Help," "The Farmer's Wife," "Family Group," "The Grand Cham's Diamond," "Lilies of the Field," "The Man who thought of Everything," "The Monkey's Paw," "Simple Sketch," "Tyranny and Teacakes" and "The Bishop's Candlesticks" were played three times each.

Mild Comedy rules the roost. I do not know all these plays but as far as I can see the "Monkey's Paw" is the one exception. I hope the list will be useful to other Hon. Secretaries.

Yours faithfully,

F. WATERFIELD,
Menton Players, France.

A CORRECTION

DEAR SIR,

In the notes on the Hull Conference in the December number of "Drama," reference is made to the performance of "The Dear Departed" (page 40). This performance was given by "The Humberston Players," one of the many Village Dramatic Societies associated with this Council which have grown up as a result of the educational work on the Drama organised by us in co-operation with the University Colleges of Nottingham and Hull. The error is a small one, but the male members of the Humberston Players may not like to be regarded as members of a Women's Institute, with which, of course, they have no connection.

Yours sincerely,

W. NORTH COATES.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

THE NORWICH PLAYERS.

In view of the growing number of visitors to Norfolk for the Whitsun Holiday, the Norwich players will present for the first time, from May 17th to May 21st, two new plays: "The Heavens Shall Laugh," a Comedy in three acts, by Nugent Monck, who is also the Director of the Maddermarket Theatre, and, for the second half of the week, "Worship No More," a Comedy in three acts, by Vernon Gardner, a promising young Dramatist whom Mr. Monck has recently discovered.

THE EDWARD ALLEYN DRAMATIC CLUB.

This Club's production of "And So To Bed," was chiefly notable for three individual characterisations of distinction, and one miscasting. The parts of Mrs. Pepys, Mrs. Knight and King Charles stood out as the work of experienced players with understanding and a real flair for the stage. Mr. Pepys was also played by an actor with genuine ability, but he missed the urbanity of the lovable rogue. Although this meant a slight upsetting of the balance of the play it did not interfere with its value as entertainment. Settings were in perfect taste; the lighting was unquestionably good, and the production generally proved that there was intelligence and technical skill behind it.

JOHN BOURNE.

BRONDESBURY.

An interesting and workmanlike performance of a new play, "Ruth," by Miss Olive Popplewell, was given at the Lecture Hall, Brondesbury, on Friday and Saturday, November 20th and 21st.

Miss Popplewell has taken the old Bible story of the love of Ruth for Naomi, and her subsequent marriage to her kinsman, Boaz, and has made of it a very charming play.

The characterisation is good. The figure of Boaz stands out, strong and fine, a real patriarch, thoughtful and careful for his people, and unselfish in his love, even to the extent of standing aside and letting a younger rival woo his lady. Ruth is well drawn, with her charm and beauty, and unselfish devotion to Naomi; her attraction towards the young Mazdiel giving place to a deeper and more enduring love for the older man. The character of Naomi, which should be a force in the background all the time, seemed a little shadowy, but this may have been due to the playing. The other characters were well indicated, though here and there the play would have been better for being more closely knit.

The performance was excellent, and the two producers, Miss Hilda Brettell and Miss Rose Bruford are to be congratulated on the pace and timing of the scenes, and the really high standard of diction.

PLYMOUTH.

MRS. ARTHUR PICKEN'S SOCIETY.

The activities of this Society, which arose during the War, and have included all types and varieties of theatrical production, ranging from Children's plays

to Shakespeare, and Musical Fantasies to Sierra's "Cradle Song" and "The Lady with a Lamp," have during the season of 1931 produced "An Echo of the 18th Century," by Mrs. Arthur Picken, played in the wonderful 18th century setting of Salham House, the seat of the Earl of Morley. A group of three plays consisting of "The Rebel"—translated from the French Barrie's "Twelve Pound Look" and "Shall we join the Ladies"—Lonsdale's "Aren't we All" and Aimee and Philip Stuart's "Nine Till Six."

The general level of the acting was excellent—outstanding performances were given by Captain Harvey, R.N. as Greaham in "Aren't we All," and by Mrs. Picken and Miss Woolcombe in "Nine Till Six" as Mrs. Pembroke and Miss Pembroke, respectively.

FOUR WINDS REPERTORY THEATRE.

It was with mingled feelings of pleasant anticipation and anxiety that I travelled down to Three Bridges to see the Worth Players' production of "Martine." The one because the productions of the Four Winds are always worth seeing; the other because I felt that the wistful delicacy of this play of Jean Jacques Bernard was beyond the power of any group of amateurs. In such a mood a certain measure of disappointment was inevitable, but criticism was disarmed by the sincerity of the production. The faults in the acting were faults of understatement which, in a play of this calibre, was perhaps an erring on the right side, but there are moments when the quite action quickens to drama and here the acting was anemic. The pivot of the play is the scene where Julien turns from his summer idyll with Martine to the intellectual companionship of Jeanne. The play turns on this moment and the actors should have risen to it, but its significance passed without emphasis and one was conscious of an opportunity missed.

But looking back, one remembers not so much the individual players as the play itself, unfolding through the changing year, from the hopefulness of Spring to the dreary toil-filled Winter. The symbolism running through it was clearly indicated without being insisted on to the point of affectation, and Robert Newton is to be congratulated on his sensitive and intelligent handling of a difficult play.

"Martine" was preceded by a sketch of Noel Coward's, which was played with considerable verve, and was perhaps rather too strong an aperitif for the delicate fare which followed.

D. C.

NATIONAL PROVINCIAL BANK SOCIETY.

Continuing its policy of presenting recognised commercial successes, this Society played "The Middle Watch" at the New Scala Theatre on October 27th. All the scenery, furniture, properties, costumes and wigs had been professionally supplied with the result that everything was finished to the nth degree and only the acting could be regarded as amateur. Team work was excellent, individuals were well cast and there was throughout the performance the essential buoyant atmosphere about everything aboard.

JOHN BOURNE.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

LONDON & LANCASHIRE DRAMATIC SOCIETY.

I have rarely witnessed as good an amateur performance, and certainly never a better than that of "The Middle Watch" performed in the Cripplegate Theatre, on the 13th of January, by the London & Lancashire Dramatic Society, indeed, it had a verve and freshness sometimes lacking in the languors of a professional appearance. These people, in fact, were doing this for sheer love of the thing, and the performance throughout was characterised by a slickness of production that, considering the length of the caste, must have been the fruit of much patient rehearsal as well as enthusiasm.

Where the team-work was so excellent throughout it is perhaps invidious to single out individual members, but, as the part of Marine Ogg, played by Mr. A. Howcroft, could not well have been bettered anywhere, his performance must remain outstanding.

A less sympathetic part, and one calling for considerable tact and taste was that of the Admiral. Admirals of the Fleet, when presented on other boards than their own, are not always convincing, and I confess that Mr. V. Dougherty, as Admiral, was the first amateur interpretation in which I have found myself firmly believing! The way in which this irate Naval Gentleman consumed his breakfast, to quote one detail alone was not merely a clever bit of business, but a first-rate piece of psychology.

Miss I. Forder as the vivacious American, and Mr. Leslie Ward as the woman-fearing Captain did not merely fulfil two exacting parts to the letter, extracting the utmost humour from every situation, they succeeded in investing these with the spirit of a purely personal charm.

Mr. Leslie Ward, it may be added, has a singularly melodious voice, and as the Captain he was not merely an efficient puppet, but a person in whom one could believe and take pleasure—achieving as he did that simplicity which is the hardest thing to capture in art, and which must always be the hall mark of any living presentation.

To-day's question as to whether the Drama is dead in England is admirably answered by a performance such as took place in the Cripplegate Theatre on the 13th of January, where from their own resources of enthusiasm and skill, a staff could put up this excellent performance from such leisure as a business life leaves them. The L.L. is to be congratulated in such a collection of live wires, and it is to be hoped the public may soon have another opportunity of tuning in to these again.

AN OLD BENSONIAN.

EDINBURGH PHILOSOPHICAL INSTITUTION DRAMATIC SOCIETY.

This Society gives monthly dramatic evenings during the winter. On a recent occasion four one-act plays were put on, the best of which was Eugene O'Neill's "In the Zone," in which both acting and production reflected much credit on all concerned.

"Mirage," by George Baird, a thin little play at best, was made the most of by harmonious setting and beautiful speaking, and the two farces, "Fourteen," by Alice Geisenberg and "Mirage," were carried through with vigour and spirit and added much to the enjoyment of a varied entertainment.

STOCKTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

The Dramatic Society of the above school gave two creditable performances of "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" in the School Hall on the 9th and 10th of December. Although the difficulty of combining distinct audibility with accents foreign both to the actors and to their audience was not completely overcome, there was some admirable acting by the principals who received the very necessary support of the minor characters by prompt and faultless cues. A remarkable convincing presentation of Lady Cicely Wayneffete demonstrated that good acting, even by a schoolboy can well surmount the barrier of sex. A problem less successfully solved was the necessity of representing large crowds on a small stage. Scenery, lighting and dressing, although comparatively economical, were appropriate and effective. Both the pleasure taken by the boys in rehearsing and the success of their performances showed that "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" is, among the works of Shaw, one of the most suitable for performance by boys.

H. C.

DALCROZE EURHYTHMICS

Rhythmic movement in Europe has achieved rapid popularity during the past few years, particularly in Germany and Austria, where every child receives some instruction in movement. England has been slow to recognise the educational value of rhythmic movement, although since 1913 London has been the British Headquarters of the Dalcroze Method of Eurhythmics, which combines the teaching of Music and Movement in a way no other method attempts and has given impetus to the various schools of Movement throughout the world.

The London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics is holding a Christmas Holiday Course which promises to be unusually interesting. In addition to Miss Ethel Driver, L.R.A.M., Dalcroze Diploma, Mistress of Method in the Training Department of the School, who will be in charge of the course, there will be two teachers of note who have been making special post graduate study of the Movement in its latest developments in Geneva and in Australia.

This Course gives a unique opportunity for people to become acquainted with the Dalcroze Method in its recent aspects. It will cater for the newcomer in search of information, the teacher anxious for refreshment, the artist desirous of experiencing beauty in form and sound, the student of music, the student of the dance, all of whom will gain help and inspiration from it. Full particulars may be obtained from:—

The London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics,
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LANCASHIRE COTTON PAGEANT.

A great pageant of the Cotton Trade will be held at Manchester in June. The producer will be Mr. Edward P. Genn, and the pageant will take place in the Belle Vue Stadium with accommodation for 40,000 spectators. The pageant starts from the earliest period of the cotton industry, and works up to a point at which cotton clothes the people of all nations:

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